

# THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY  
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS  
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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**UNHEALTHY EATING, LACK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SEEN AS GREATEST HEALTH RISK FACING CALIFORNIA KIDS. VOTERS BELIEVE OBESITY PREVENTION EFFORTS SHOULD INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY AS WELL AS KIDS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Almost half (48 percent) of California's voters consider unhealthy eating habits or a lack of physical activity to be the greatest health risk facing California kids today, up from 35 percent who said this in 2003.

These two obesity-related threats are now more than twice the proportion citing illegal drug use (22 percent), the next most frequently mentioned childhood health risk.

All major segments of the voter population, including voters in all parties and across all demographic and regional subdivisions, view unhealthy eating or a lack of physical activity as the greatest health risk to state's kids. Parents with children under age 18 are among the most likely to feel this way.

Nearly three in four voters (73 percent) believe obesity prevention efforts should involve the community as well as kids and their families. This view includes voters of all parties and major subgroups of the state.

The survey also finds that large majorities believe public investments aimed at keeping people healthy pay for themselves in the long run by preventing disease and reducing health care costs (73 percent) and think that a comprehensive program to prevent childhood obesity would be worth it even if it increased government spending by billions of dollars (68 percent).

These are the findings from an annual *Field-TCE Childhood Obesity Prevention Survey* conducted by *The Field Poll* on behalf of The California Endowment.

"Californians understand that health happens in schools, in neighborhoods, and with prevention. Regardless of age, ethnicity, income or political ideology, they recognize that investments in prevention save money over the long run. And Californians want action now. With so many of our

children at risk for obesity and obesity-related illness, they agree we cannot afford to wait. I hope our state's leaders heed the wisdom of their constituents," said Dr. Robert K. Ross, President and CEO of The California Endowment.

### **Growing concern about lack of physical activity among California kids**

The current survey finds that compared to past surveys an increasing proportion (20 percent) of voters now cite a lack of physical activity as the greatest health risk facing California kids. For example, in 2003 just 12 percent reported this.

There is nearly unanimous agreement among voters (97 percent) that it's important for the schools to be encouraging more physical activity during regular school hours. In addition, three in four (74 percent) think that providing kids with more physical activity during regular school hours will also have a positive effect on academic achievement.

Voters say it's also important for government to be doing things to make it easier for kids to be healthy in California. This includes improving public safety so kids can use local parks or walk on neighborhood streets (89 percent) and building more parks, sidewalks and bike lanes (79 percent).

### **Unhealthy eating habits remain the top health risk to kids**

In each of four statewide surveys conducted by *The Field Poll* since 2003 voters have consistently cited unhealthy eating habits as the single greatest health risk facing California children. In the current survey 28 percent say this.

Voters feel it is important for the schools, government and the food and beverage industry to address this problem. For example, very large majorities concur that it is important to make healthy foods and drinks available in the schools (96 percent), and for government to make drinking water available for free in schools, parks and government buildings (85 percent). In addition, greater than three in four believe it is important for the food and beverage industry to change the ingredients in their products to reduce fat and calories (81 percent) and voluntarily not advertise unhealthy products, like fast food and sodas, on TV shows that kids frequently watch (76 percent).

### **Obesity prevention requires involvement of the community**

A large majority of voters (73 percent) believes obesity prevention efforts should involve the community as well as kids and their families. This compares to just 22 percent who think it should be addressed only by children and their families.

When asked which community groups or organizations should be playing a role in these efforts most frequently cited are health care providers (94 percent), the local public schools (91 percent) and local community and civic organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, United Way and the PTA (83 percent). Greater than seven in ten also mention food and beverage companies, food retailers, companies that advertise, fast food restaurants and government.

**Where a child is raised seen as having a big impact on health**

Six in ten voters (60 percent) think the neighborhood where a child is raised matters a lot when it comes to being healthy and helping kids get enough physical activity and healthy food. Voters living in the state's urban areas are more likely to say this than those living in Central Valley or rural parts of Northern California. Latinos, African Americans and Asian Americans are also more inclined to believe where a child is raised matters a lot when it comes to keeping kids healthy.

**Potential revenue sources for obesity prevention efforts**

To help government pay for obesity prevention programs, 57 percent of California voters favor giving local governments the authority to tax products, like alcohol, cigarettes, junk foods or sweetened beverages, if approved by a majority of voters.

In addition, 62 percent of the voters surveyed said they support imposing a special fee on soda and soft drinks and use the money to fight childhood obesity, of whom 45 percent support it strongly.

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**About The California Endowment**

The California Endowment, a private, statewide health foundation, was established in 1996 to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. Headquartered in downtown Los Angeles, The Endowment has regional offices in Sacramento, Oakland, Fresno and San Diego, with program staff working throughout the state. The Endowment challenges the conventional wisdom that medical settings and individual choices are solely responsible for people's health. The Endowment believes that health happens in neighborhoods, schools and with prevention. For more information, please visit The Endowment's website at [www.calendow.org](http://www.calendow.org).

### **About the Survey**

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed November 15-27, 2011 among a random sample of 1,000 registered voters in California. In order to cover a broad range of issues, some of the questions in this release were asked of a random subsample of either 485 or 515 voters.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish using live interviewers working from Field Research Corporation's central location telephone interviewing facilities. Up to six attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

Interviewing was completed on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. In this survey 775 interviews were derived from landline sample listings and 225 from cell phone listings. After the completion of interviewing, the overall registered voter sample was weighted to *Field Poll* estimates of the characteristics of the registered voter population in California by region, age, gender and party registration.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size as well as the percentage distribution being examined. The maximum sampling error estimates for results based on the overall registered voters sample is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings based on each of the random subsamples have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. The maximum sampling error is based on results in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., percentages at or near 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (those closer to 10% or 90%) have a smaller margin of error. There are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of the survey sought to minimize these other possible sources of error.

*The Field Poll* was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field, who is still an active advisor. The *Poll* has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. The *Poll* receives annual funding from media subscribers of *The Field Poll*, from several California foundations, and the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the data files from each *Field Poll* survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes.

### **Questions Asked**

(see topline findings)

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**Chart Pack Summarizing the Findings from the**  
**Field-TCE Childhood Obesity**  
**Prevention Survey**

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Conducted for  
*The California Endowment*

by  
*The Field Poll*

## About The Survey

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Population surveyed: California registered voters

Interviews conducted: Live telephone interviews with 1,000 voters in English and Spanish. Some questions asked of random subsamples of 485 or 515 voters.

Interviewing period: November 15-27, 2011

Auspices: Conducted on behalf of The California Endowment

Sampling methods: Voters sampled randomly from California voter rolls

Sampling error estimates: The statewide findings have a maximum sampling error of +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level

**Table 1**

**Trend of public opinion regarding the greatest health risk facing California kids**

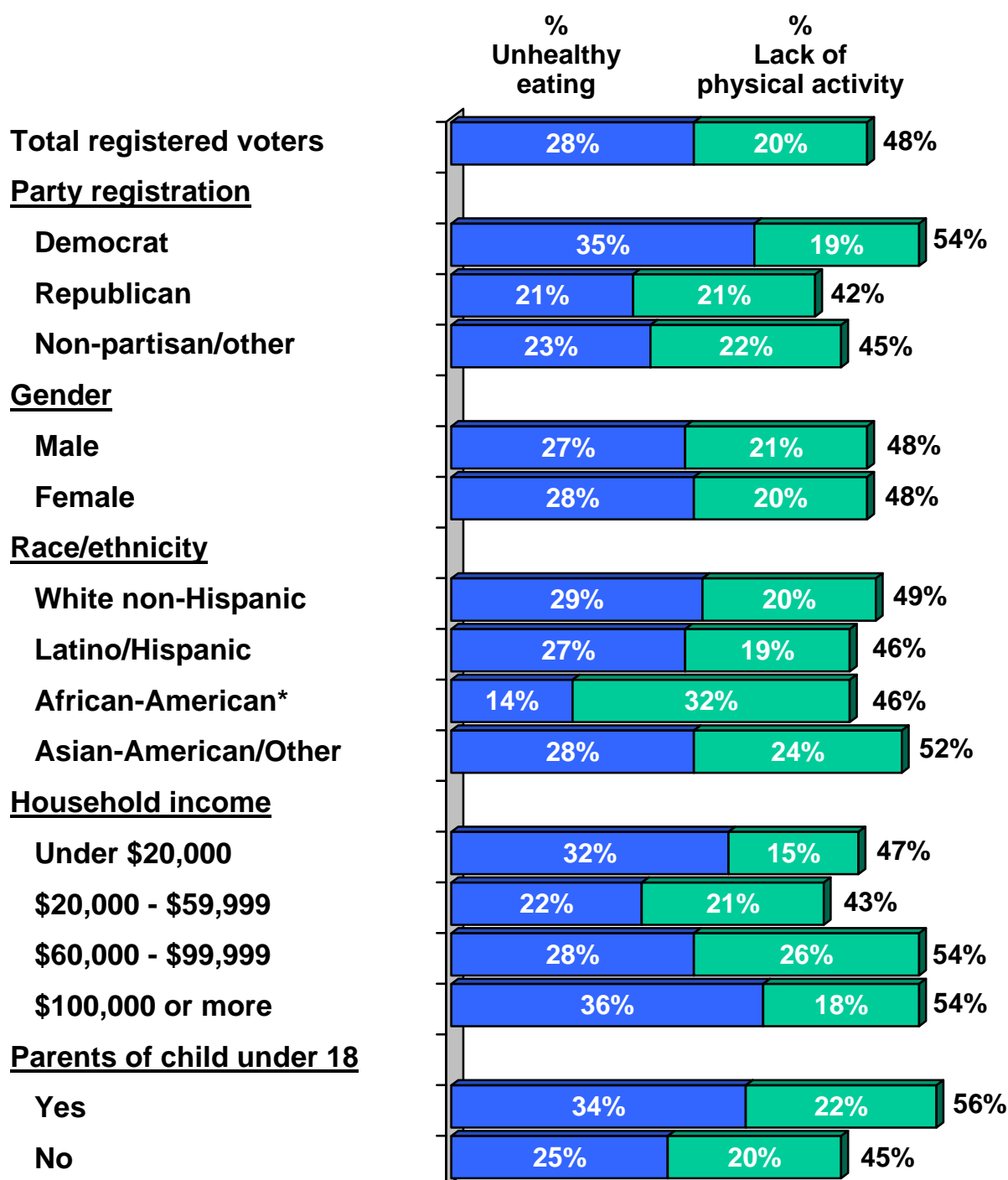
	<b><u>Nov. 2003</u></b>	<b><u>Dec. 2007</u></b>	<b><u>Oct. 2010</u></b>	<b><u>Nov. 2011</u></b>
Unhealthy eating habits/lack of physical activity (net)	<u>35%</u>	<u>42%</u>	<u>46%</u>	<u>48%</u>
Unhealthy eating habits	23	25	31	28
Lack of physical activity	12	17	15	20
Illegal drug use	27	27	17	22
Violence	N/A	N/A	13	11
Smoking	15	10	4	7
Alcohol abuse	11	10	6	5
Unsafe sexual behaviors	11	10	7	3
Other/no opinion	1	1	7	4

*N/A: Not asked.*

*Note: 2003 and 2007 surveys conducted among a random sample of California adults, while 2010 and 2011 surveys conducted among California registered voters.*

**Table 2**

**Proportions describing either “unhealthy eating habits”  
or “lack of physical activity” as kids’ greatest health risk  
– by subgroup**

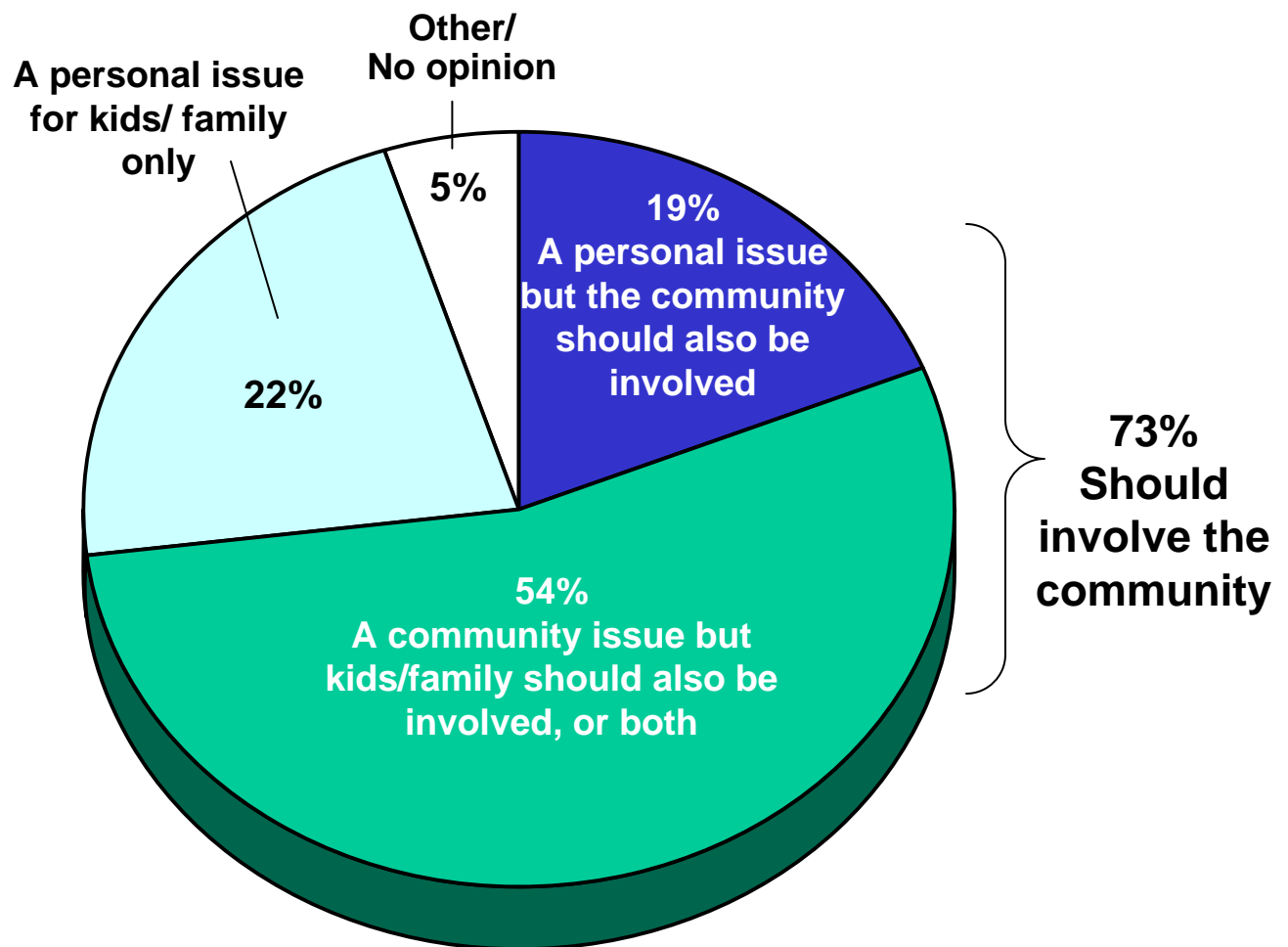


\* Small sample base.



**Table 3**

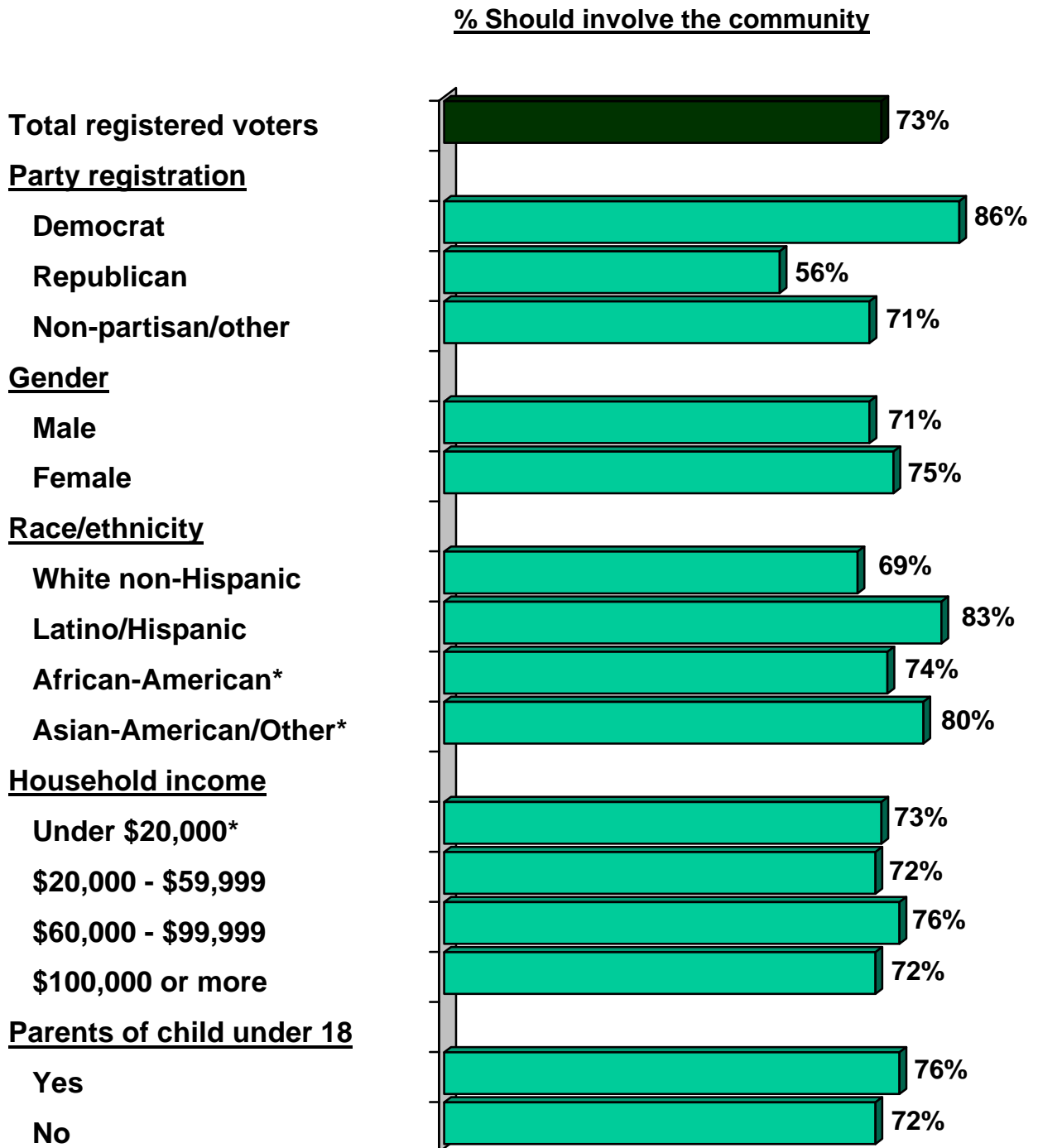
## **Reducing obesity among children: Who should be involved?**



*Note: The entire community was defined as including medical care providers and community groups.*

**Table 4**

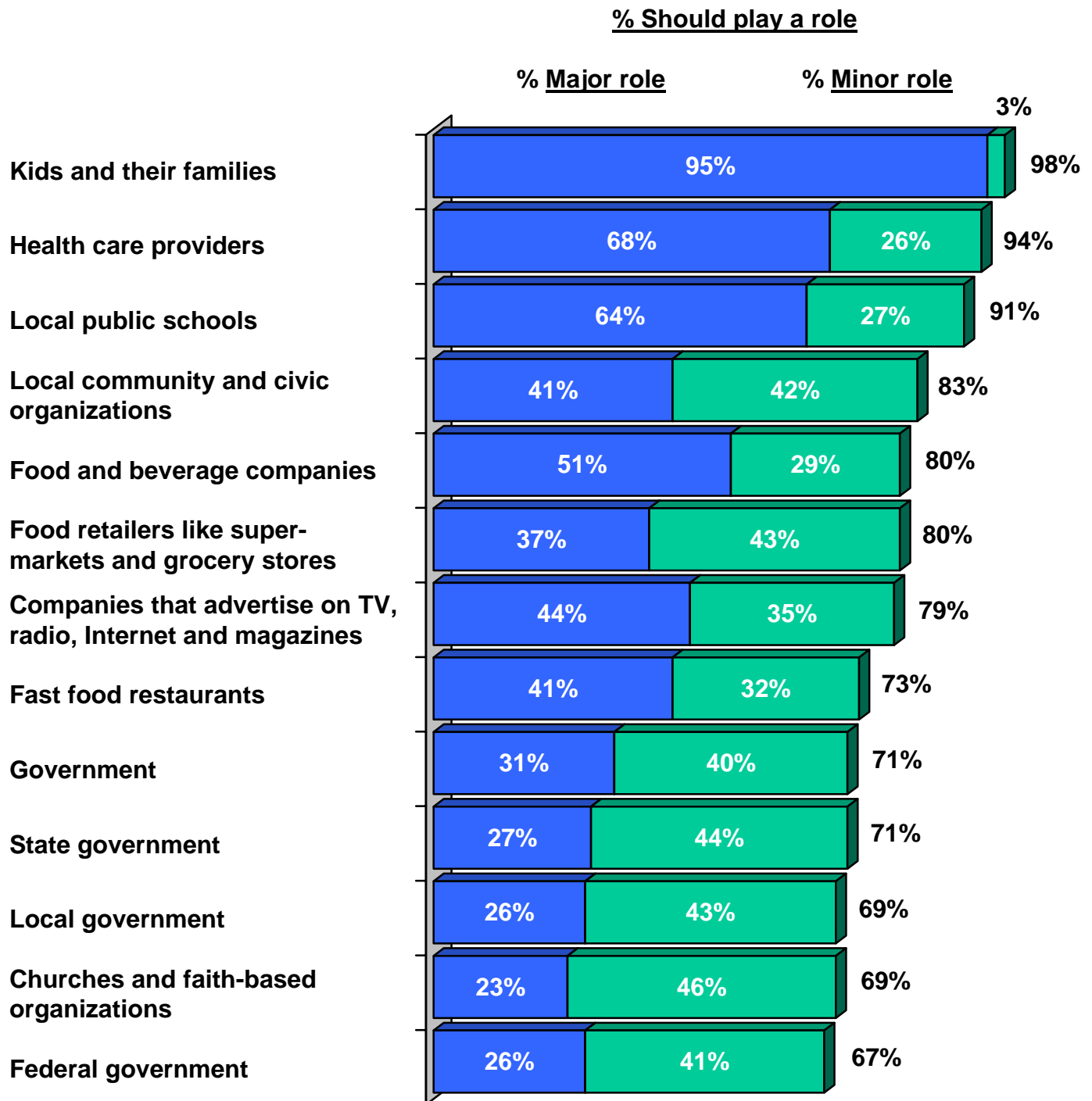
**Reducing obesity: Proportions who feel the community should be involved – by subgroup**



\* Small sample base.

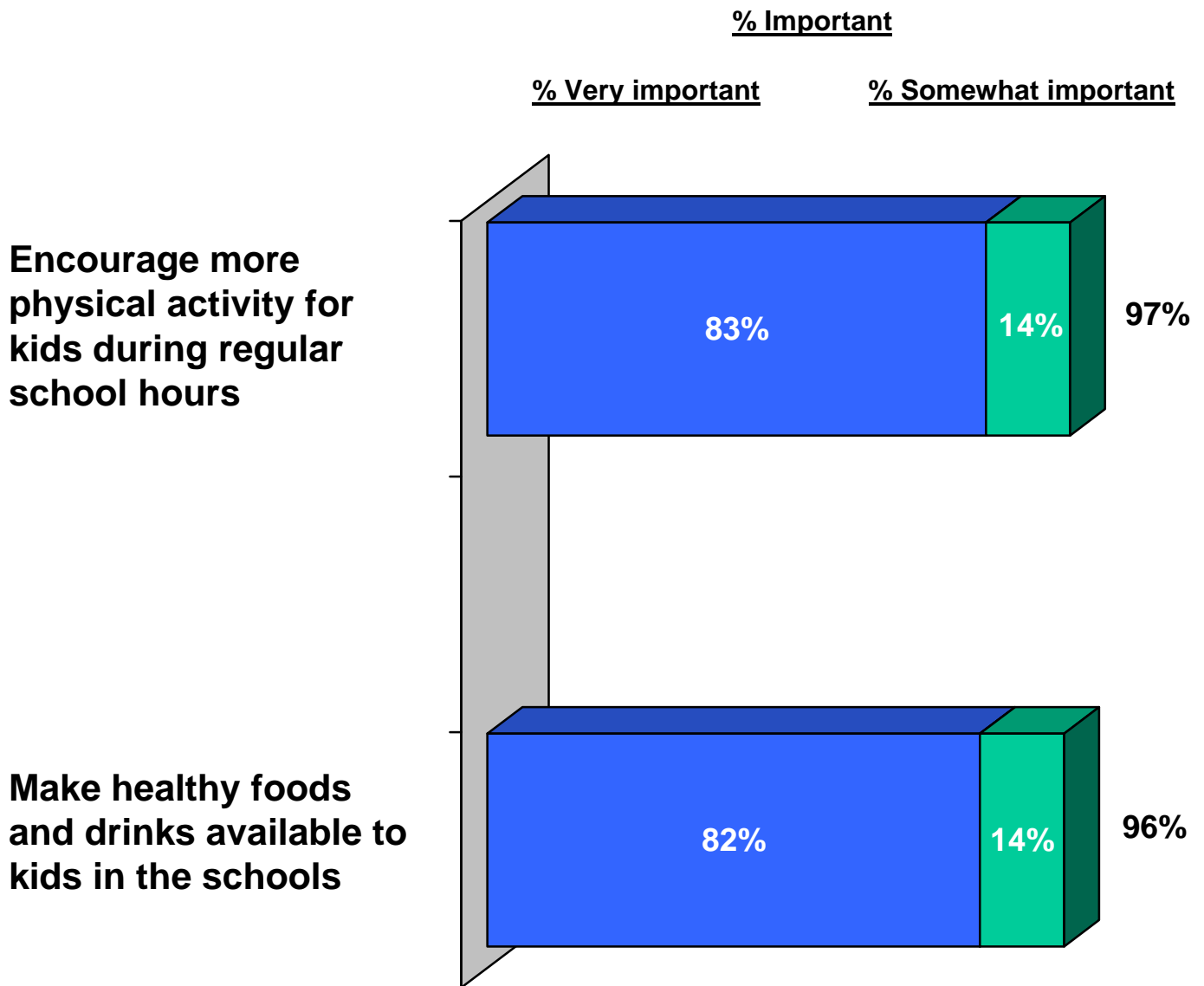
**Table 5**

**How much of a role should different groups and organizations play in helping to address childhood obesity**



**Table 6**

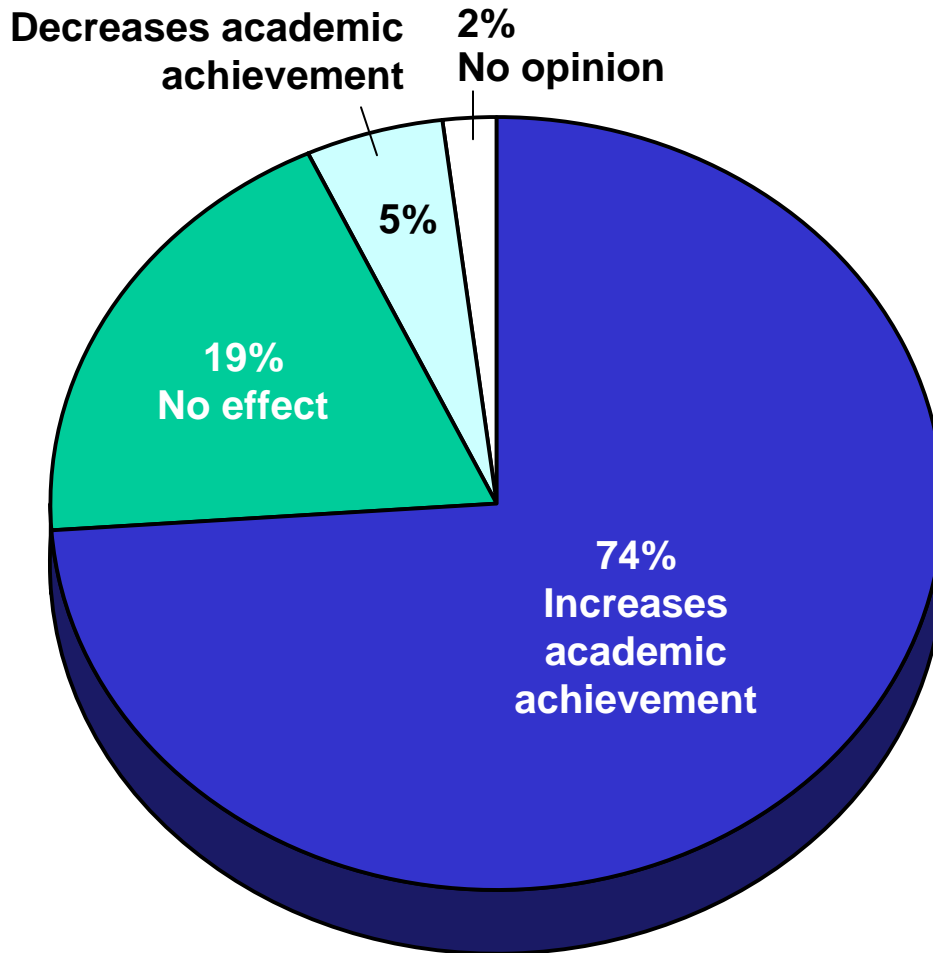
**Importance for the local K-12 schools to do the following  
to make it easier for people to be healthy**



**Table 7**

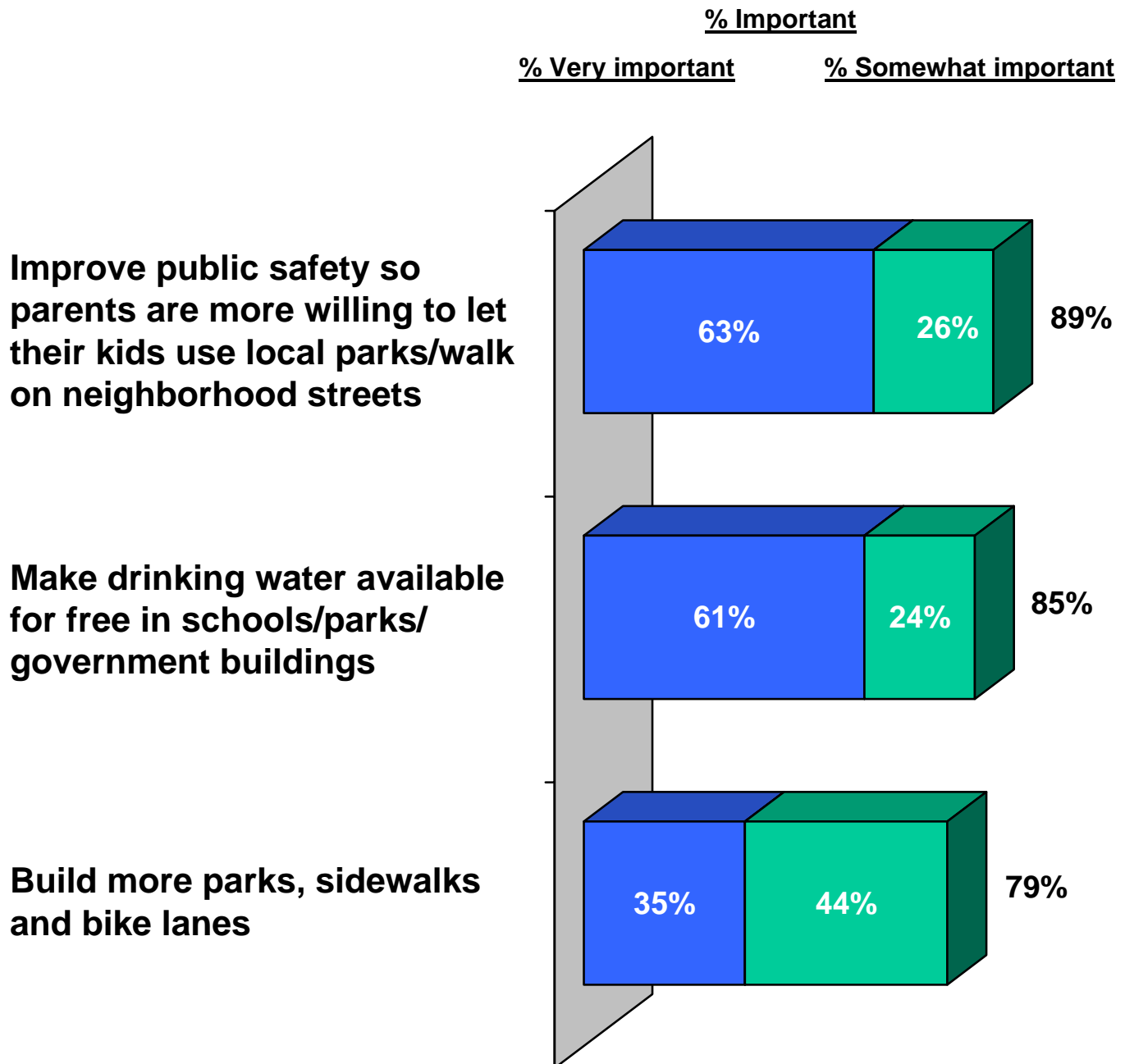
**Impact that giving kids more physical activity during regular school hours would have on their academic achievement opportunities in school**

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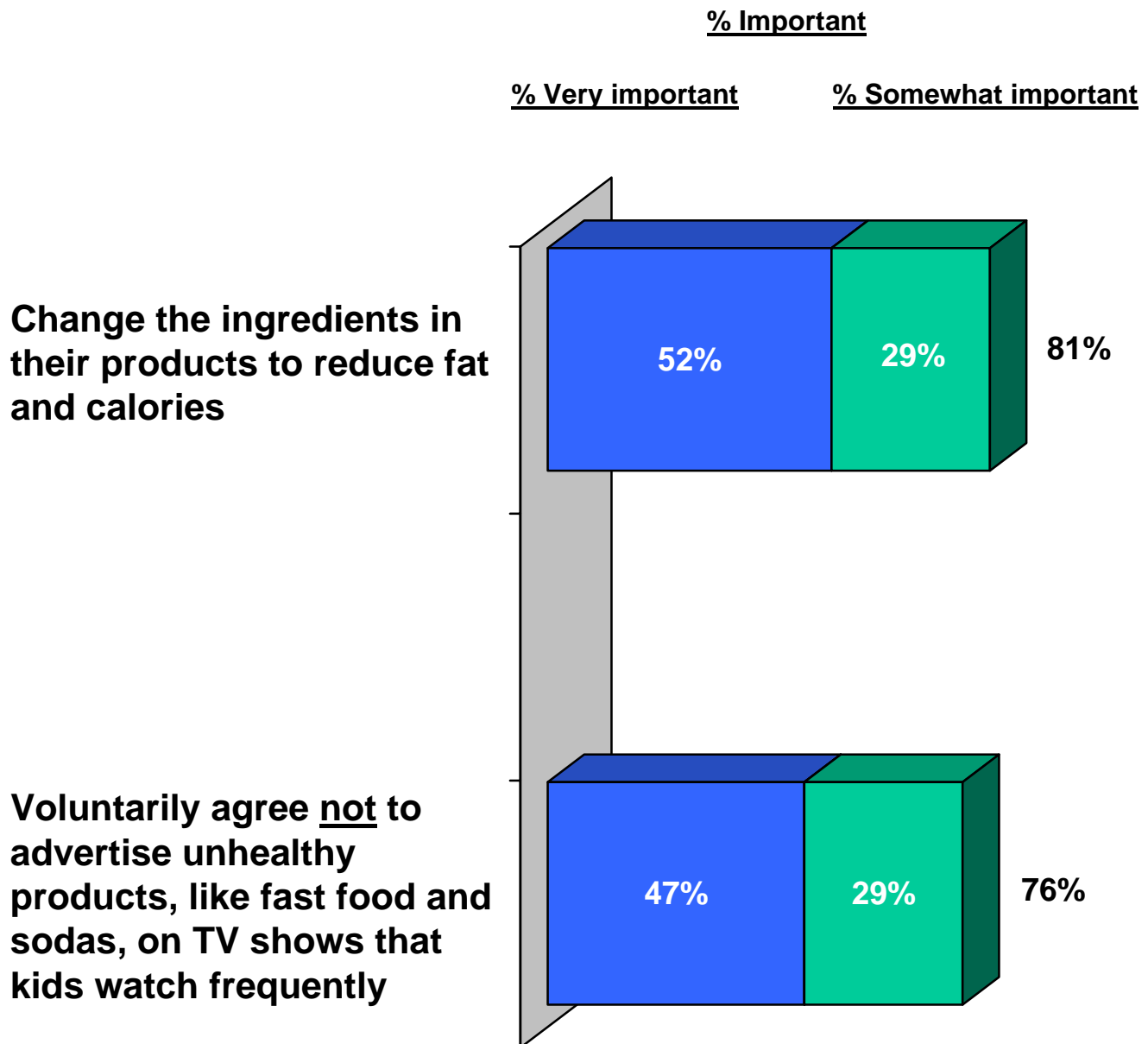
**Table 8**

**Importance for government to do the following to  
make it easier for people to be healthy**



**Table 9**

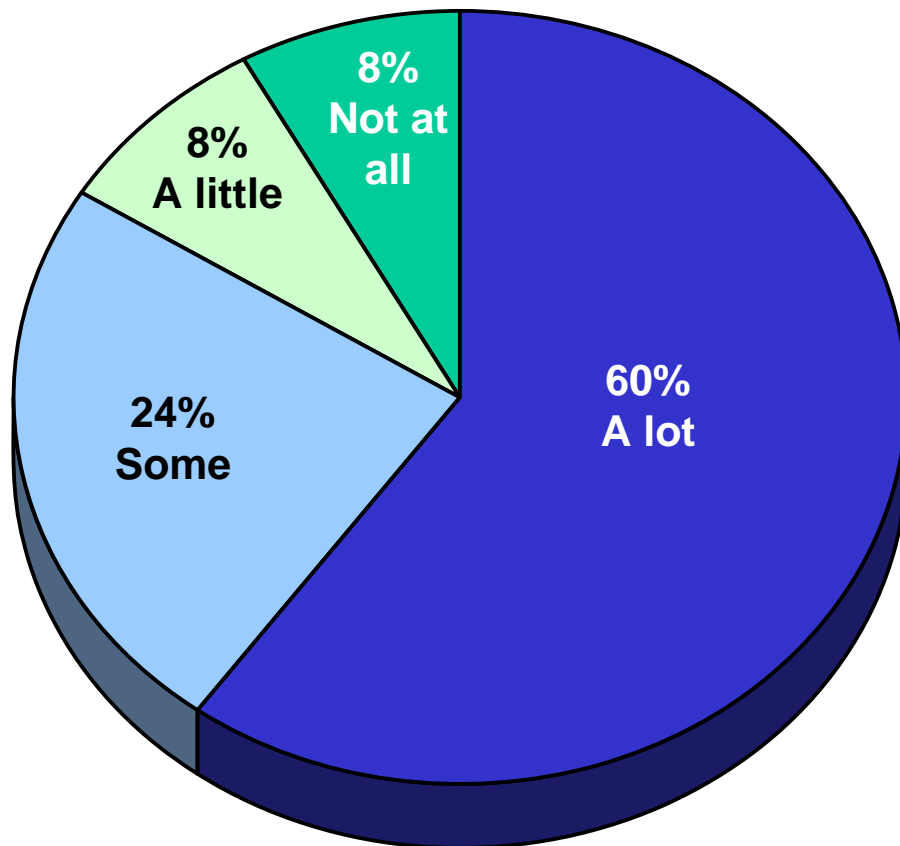
**Importance for the food and beverage industry to do the following to make it easier for people to be healthy**



**Table 10**

**How much does the neighborhood where a child is raised matter with regard to being healthy, getting enough physical activity and eating healthy foods**

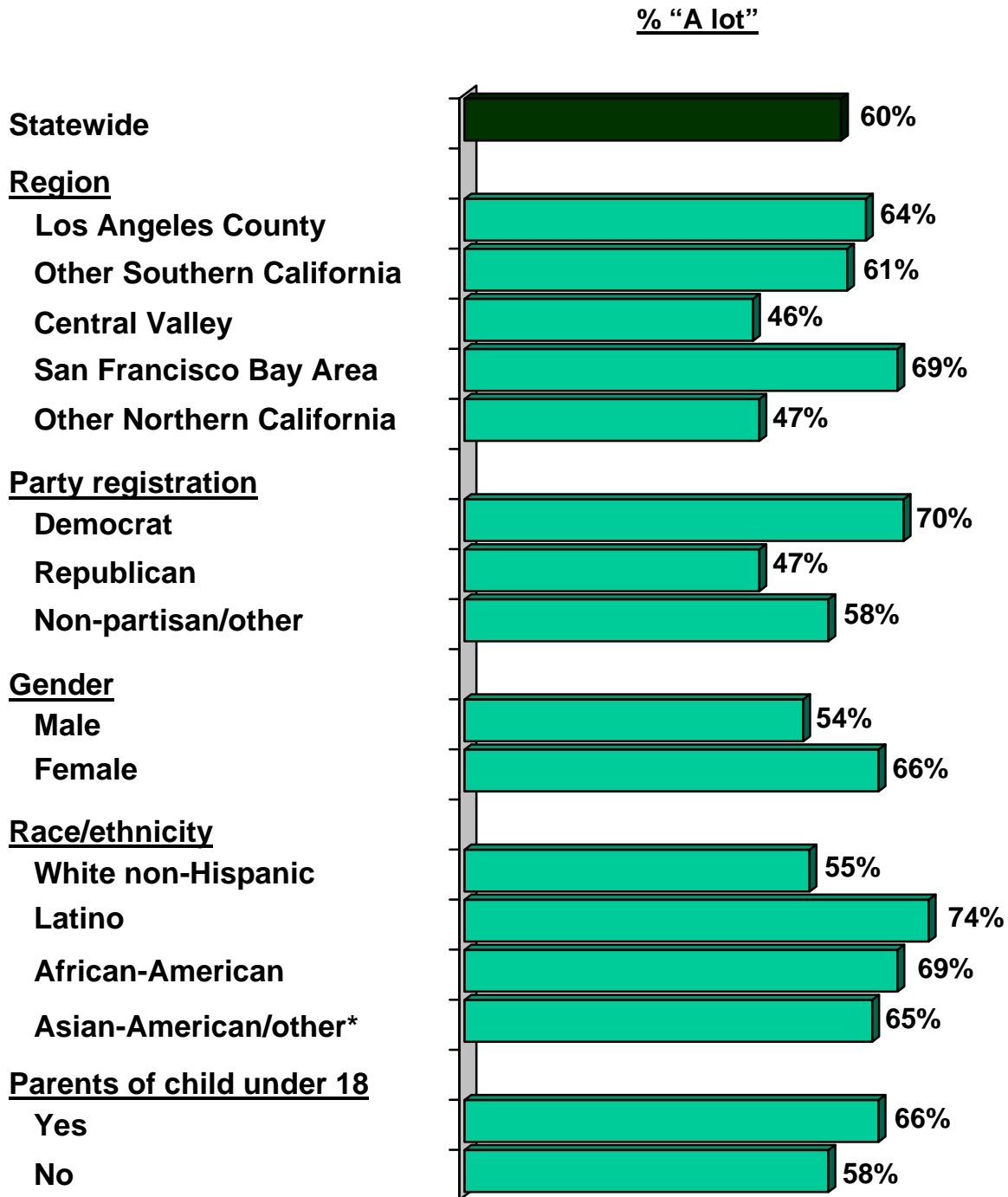
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**Table 11**

**Proportions who feel the neighborhood where a child is raised matters a lot with regard to being healthy, getting enough physical activity and eating healthy foods**

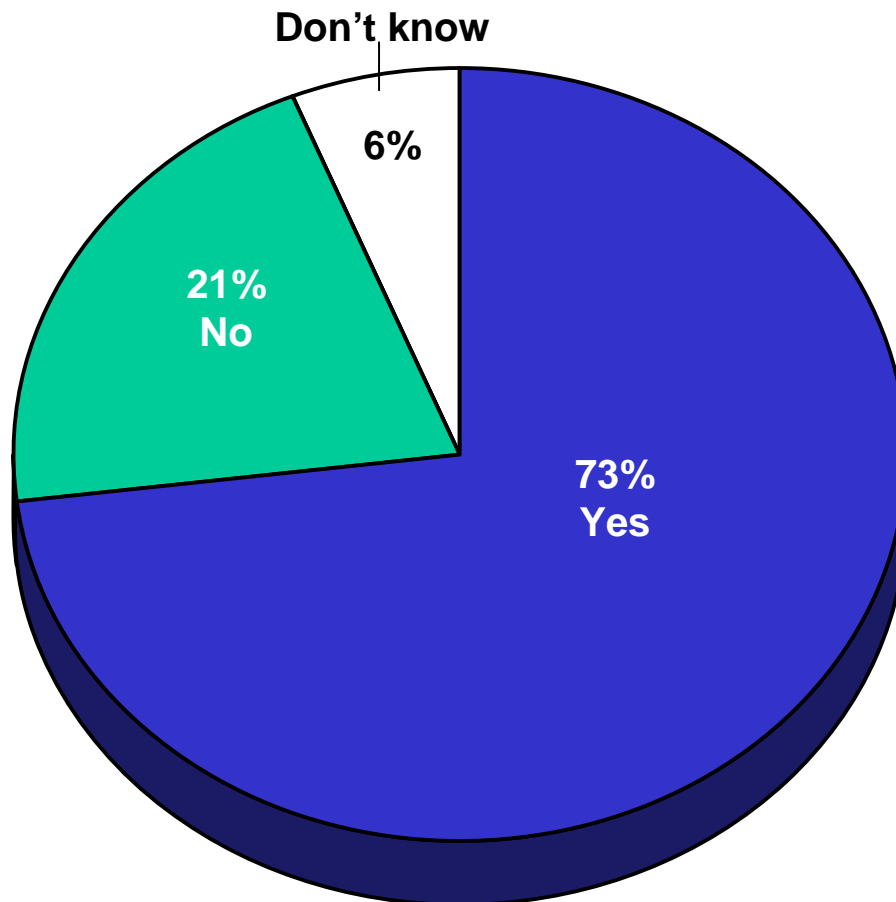


\* Small sample base.

**Table 12**

**Do public investments aimed at keeping people healthy pay for themselves in the long run by preventing disease and reducing health care costs?**

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**Table 13**

**Investing more in preventing childhood obesity  
in a recessionary economy**

**Childhood obesity...**

**It's an important issue and  
we should invest more in  
preventing it now**

**48%**

**It's an important issue, but  
we should wait until the  
economy improves before  
investing more**

**33%**

**We shouldn't be investing  
more in it, no matter what  
happens in the economy**

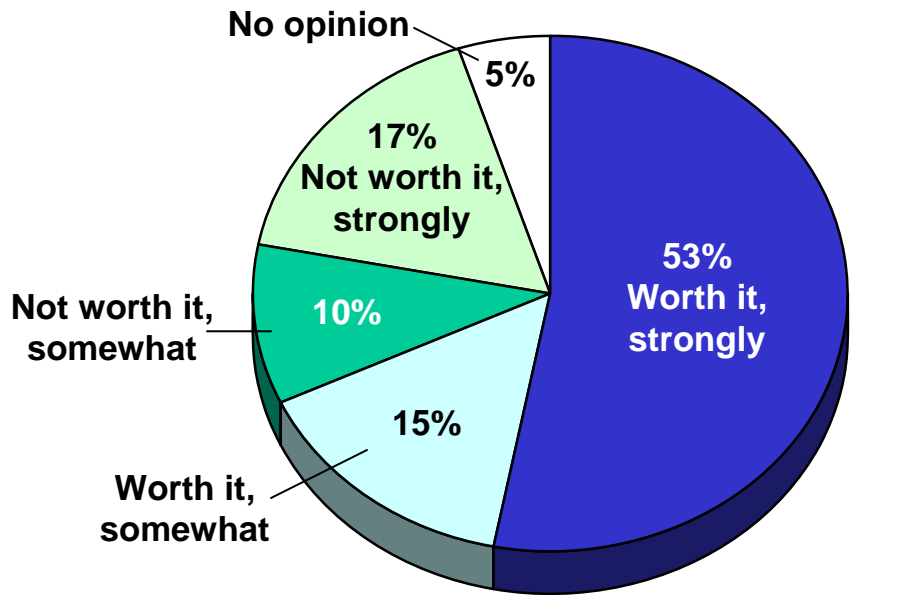
**16%**

**No opinion**

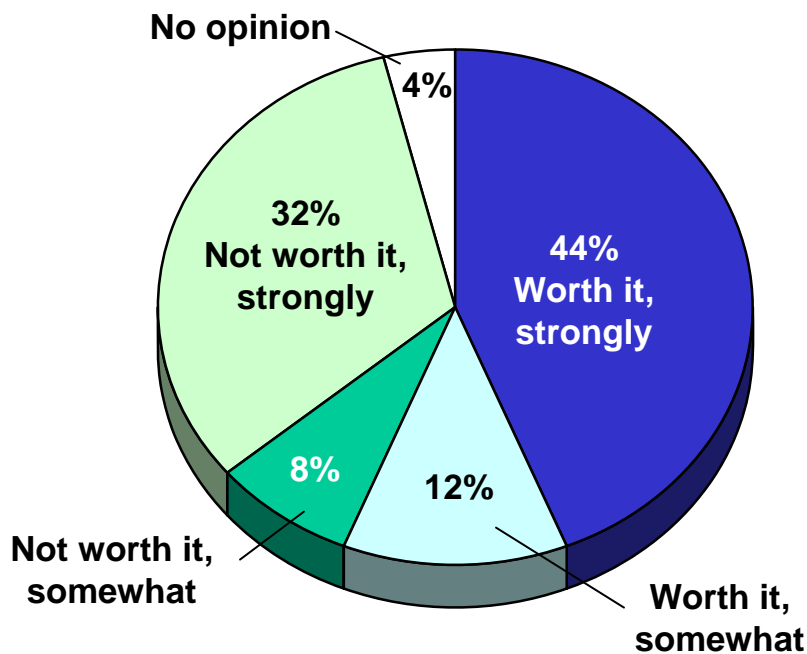
**3%**

**Table 14**

**Would a comprehensive program to prevent childhood obesity be worth it, even if it would increase government spending by billions of dollars per year – comparing CA and US public opinion**



**CALIFORNIA**

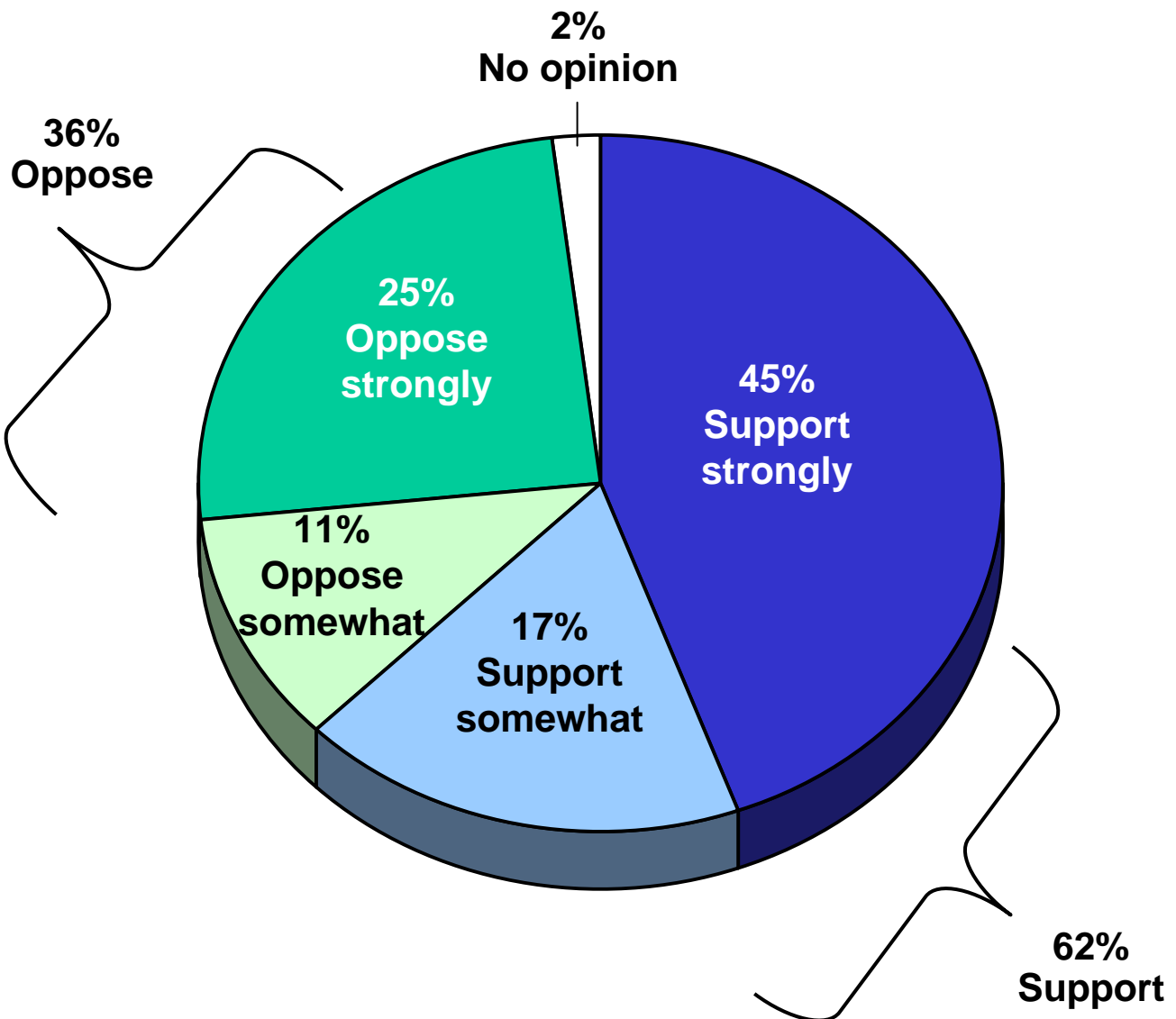


**U.S.\***

\* Survey of 1,200 registered voters in the U.S., conducted April 22 – May 2, 2010 by Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosen Research.

**Table 15**

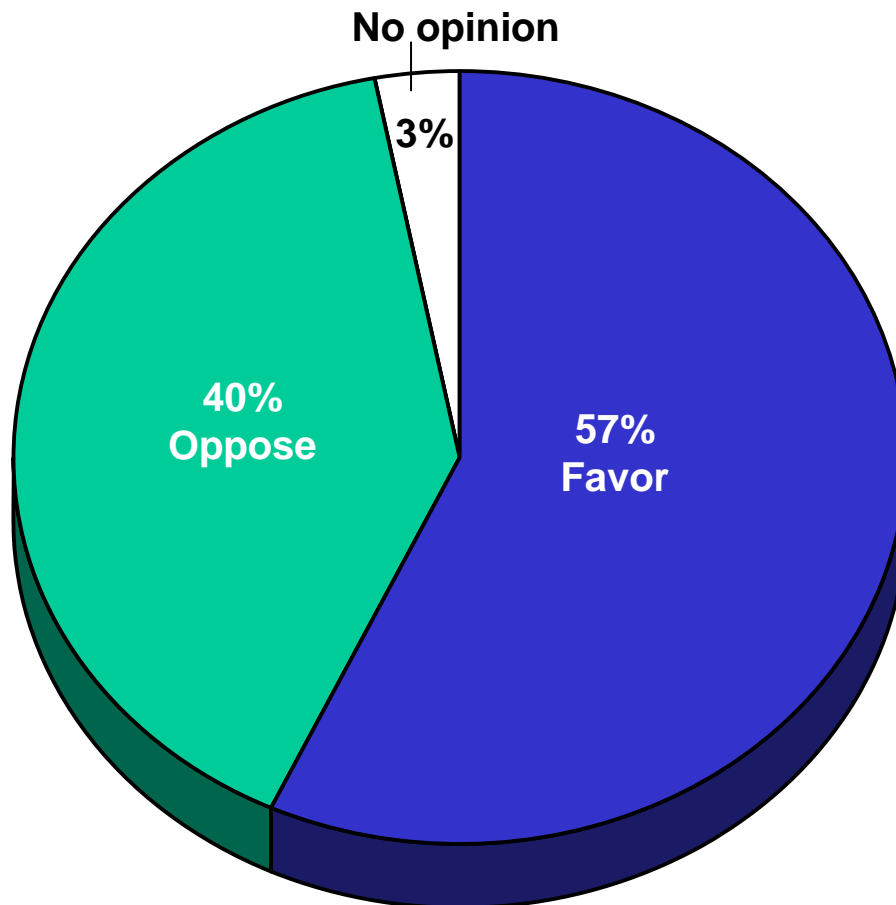
**Voter opinions about the state imposing a special fee  
on soda and soft drinks, using the money to  
fight childhood obesity**



**Table 16**

**Opinions about giving local governments the authority to tax products like alcohol, cigarettes, junk foods or sweetened beverages, if approved by a vote of the people**

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**Topline Findings**  
**TCE/Field Child Obesity Prevention Survey**  
(November 2011)

(n = 1,000 CA reg. voters)

1a. I am going to read some health risks to kids in California. Please tell me which one ... in your opinion... poses the greatest health risk to kids in California today. The categories are... **(READ BACK ALL CATEGORIES IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:)** Which of these poses the greatest health risk to kids in California today?

1b. **(IF FIRST MENTION GIVEN, ASK:)** Which poses the next greatest health risk to kids? **(READ BACK CATEGORIES IF NECESSARY)**

	<u>1ST MENTION</u>	<u>2ND MENTION</u>
( ) smoking.....	7%	6%
( ) unhealthy eating habits .....	28	20
( ) alcohol abuse.....	5	9
( ) unsafe sexual behaviors .....	3	7
( ) illegal drug use.....	22	15
( ) lack of physical activity .....	20	21
( ) violence.....	11	16
<b>DO NOT READ</b> { SOMETHING ELSE (volunteered) .....	1	*
<b>DO NOT READ</b> { DON'T KNOW / REFUSED .....	3	6

2. How serious do you feel the problem of obesity, or being seriously overweight, is among children and teens in California today – very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious or not at all serious?

VERY SERIOUS.....	57%
SOMEWHAT SERIOUS .....	37
NOT TOO SERIOUS .....	5
NOT AT ALL SERIOUS .....	1
DON'T KNOW / REFUSED.....	*

3. Some people believe that reducing obesity among children is a personal issue that kids and their families should deal with on their own. Others feel it is an issue that needs to be addressed by the entire community, including medical care providers and community groups. Which is closer to your opinion...? **(REPEAT ANSWER CATEGORIES AGAIN, IF NECESSARY)?**

- It's a personal issue that kids and their families should deal with ....(1)  
It's an issue that needs to be addressed by the entire community, including medical care providers and community groups .....(2)  
BOTH (VOLUNTEERED) .....  
DON'T KNOW / REFUSED .....

**IF PERSONAL ISSUE (Q3 = 1), ASK:**

4a. Do you feel that groups and organizations outside the family, such as medical care providers, the schools, local government and community groups like the Chamber of Commerce, United Way and the PTA should or should not be involved in efforts to reduce obesity among children? (new)

**IF ENTIRE COMMUNITY (Q3 = 2), ASK:**

4b. Do you feel that kids and their families should or should not personally be involved in efforts to reduce obesity among children? (new)

Both kids/families and entire community should be involved .....73%  
- More community/both.....54  
- More personal but community also involved19  
Only a personal issue for kids/families.....22  
No opinion .....5

5. I am going to read some different groups and organizations. For each please tell me whether you feel they should play a major role, a minor role, or no role in helping to address the issue of obesity among children. (Form A) (READ ITEMS IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Should (ITEM) play a major role, a minor role, or no role?

	MAJOR ROLE	MINOR ROLE	NO ROLE	DK/ REF
( ) a. government.....	31%	40	28	1
( ) b. churches and faith-based organizations.....	23%	46	28	3
( ) c. food retailers , like supermarkets and grocery stores .....	37%	43	19	1
( ) d. the local public schools .....	64%	27	8	1
( ) e. food and beverage companies .....	51%	29	19	1
( ) f. companies that advertise on TV, radio, the Internet or in newspapers or magazines .....	44%	35	20	1

5. I am going to read some different groups and organizations. For each please tell me whether you feel they should play a major role, a minor role, or no role in helping to address the issue of obesity among children. (Form B) (READ ITEMS IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Should (ITEM) play a major role, a minor role, or no role?

	MAJOR ROLE	MINOR ROLE	NO ROLE	DK/ REF
( ) g. the federal government .....	26%	41	32	1
( ) h.. fast food restaurants.....	41%	32	26	1
( ) i. health care providers.....	68%	26	5	1
( ) j. kids and their families.....	95%	3	1	1
( ) k. local community and civic organizations, like the Chamber of Commerce, United Way and the PTA .....	41%	42	16	1
( ) l. state government.....	27%	44	28	1
( ) m. local government .....	26%	43	30	1

6. Next, I am going to read some things that government could do to make it easier for people to be healthy. For each, please tell me how important you feel it is for the government to do this. (READ ITEMS IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) How important is it for government to do this – very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important?

	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NOT TOO IMPORTANT	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	DK/ REF
(Form A) ( ) a. build more parks, sidewalks and bike lanes for kids and their families.....	35%	44	12	8	1
(Form A) ( ) b. make drinking water available for free in all local schools, parks and government buildings .....	61%	24	5	7	3
(Form B) ( ) c. improve public safety, so parents are more willing to let their kids use local parts or walk on neighborhood streets.....	63%	26	4	5	2



7. Next, I am going to read some things that the food and beverage industry could do so that it is easier for people to be healthy. For each, please tell me how important you feel it is for the food and beverage industry to do this. (**READ ITEMS IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:**) How important is it for the food and beverage industry to do this – very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important?
- |   | VERY<br>IMPORTANT | SOMEWHAT<br>IMPORTANT | NOT TOO<br>IMPORTANT | NOT AT ALL<br>IMPORTANT | DK/<br>REF |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| ( ) a. change the ingredients in their products to reduce fat and calories .....  | 52%               | 29                    | 9                    | 9                       | 1          |
| ( ) b. voluntarily agree not to advertise unhealthy products, like fast food and sodas, on TV shows that kids watch frequently..... | 47%               | 29                    | 11                   | 12                      | 1          |
8. Next, I am going to read some things that k-12 schools could do so that it is easier for people to be healthy. For each, please tell me how important you feel it is for local schools to do this. (**READ ITEMS IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:**) How important is it for local schools to do this – very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important?
- |   | VERY<br>IMPORTANT | SOMEWHAT<br>IMPORTANT | NOT TOO<br>IMPORTANT | NOT AT ALL<br>IMPORTANT | DK/<br>REF |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| ( ) a. make healthy foods and drinks available to kids in the schools.....        | 82%               | 14                    | 2                    | 2                       | *          |
| ( ) b. encourage more physical activity for kids during regular school hours..... | 83%               | 14                    | 1                    | 2                       | *          |
9. If local schools spent more time ensuring that kids get more physical activity during regular school hours, do you think this would increase, decrease or have no effect on the academic achievement opportunities that kids would have at school?
- |                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| INCREASE .....             | 74% |
| DECREASE .....             | 5   |
| NO EFFECT .....            | 19  |
| DON'T KNOW / REFUSED ..... | 2   |
10. A comprehensive program to prevent childhood obesity might include things like building or improving parks and bringing healthier food into schools and promoting neighborhood safety so people spend more time outdoors. If you knew these types of programs would increase government spending by billions of dollars a year, do you think it would be worth it or not worth it to make this investment in preventing childhood obesity? Do you feel this way strongly or not so strongly?
- |                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| WORTH IT – STRONGLY.....            | 53% |
| WORTH IT – NOT SO STRONGLY .....    | 15  |
| NOT WORTH IT – NOT SO STRONGLY..... | 10  |
| NOT WORTH IT – STRONGLY.....        | 17  |
| DON'T KNOW / REFUSED .....          | 5   |
11. How much do you feel the neighborhood where a child is raised matters when it comes to being healthy, and helping children get enough physical activity and healthy food? Do you think this matters a lot, some, a little or not at all?
- |                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| A LOT.....                 | 60% |
| SOME .....                 | 24  |
| A LITTLE .....             | 8   |
| NOT AT ALL.....            | 8   |
| DON'T KNOW / REFUSED ..... | *   |
12. Which of the following three statements do you agree with the most. (**READ ALL THREE STATEMENTS**)  
(Form A) Which of these statements do you agree with the most?
- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| (1) Childhood obesity is an important issue and we need to invest more in preventing it right now.....                                  | 48% |
| (2) Childhood obesity is an important issue, but we should wait until the economy improves before we invest more in preventing it ..... | 33  |
| -- OR -- (3) We shouldn't invest more in preventing childhood obesity, no matter what happens in the economy .....                      | 16  |
| DON'T KNOW / REFUSED .....  | 3   |

13.	Do public investments aimed at keeping people healthy, like building parks where people can be active and promoting neighborhood safety so people spend more time outdoors, pay for themselves in the long run by preventing disease and reducing health care costs?	YES ..... 73% NO..... 21 DON'T KNOW / REFUSED..... 6
14.	Do you support or oppose having the state put a special <u>fee</u> on the sale of soda and soft drinks and use the money to fight obesity among children? Do you (support) (oppose) this strongly or somewhat?	SUPPORT STRONGLY ..... 45% SUPPORT SOMEWHAT ..... 18 OPPOSE SOMEWHAT ..... 11 OPPOSE STRONGLY ..... 25 DON'T KNOW / REFUSED ..... 1
15.	Local governments in California already have some taxing authority. This includes the power to raise local sales, utility or parcel taxes, if approved by a vote of the people. Some have suggested also allowing local governments to tax certain products like alcohol, cigarettes, junk foods or sweetened beverages. If voters were required to approve any increases to these taxes, would you favor or oppose giving local governments the power to tax these kinds of products?	FAVOR..... 57% OPPOSE ..... 40 DON'T KNOW / REFUSED..... 3

\* Less than ½ of 1%.